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Book 1

A STUDY

OF

GEORGE WASHINGTON.

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A STUDY

OF

GEORGE WASHINGTON.

BY

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IN THE STATE OF NEW JERSEY.

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THE LIFE
OF GEORGE WASHINGTON.

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A STUDY OF GEORGE WASHINGTON.

The study of the life and character of General Washington is a pleasant and instructive work to every true American scholar. To one who loves to search among the records, letters, documents and contemporaneous biographies of the Revolutionary period, nothing is more interesting than to picture to oneself in strong outlines the grand personality of the great commander. It is a most delightful pastime on a winter evening, surrounded by a library rich in Americana, to read what has been said of him by officers of his own army, by distinguished members of the French contingent and by the common people—how he appeared to them, how he impressed them from the time he drew his sword on the common at Cambridge until he bade them farewell at the Fraunces Tavern in New York. I shall give you the result of my own searches on this line in as brief a sketch as possible, and in this way, on his natal day, we will to some degree, I trust, form a conception of what manner of man he was.

In a letter from John Adams to his wife, dated June 17, 1775, we find the following paragraph, descriptive of the young soldier who had just been selected to lead the fortunes of the cause of independence: "I can now inform you that the Congress have made choice of the modest and virtuous, the amiable, generous and brave George Washington, Esquire, to be General of the American Army."

And the next day the same great statesman wrote to Elbridge Gerry, "There is something charming to me in the conduct of Washington. A gentleman of one of the first fortunes upon the continent leaving his delicious retirement, his family and friends, sacrificing his ease and hazarding all in the cause of his country! His views are noble and disinterested!"

After the disastrous battle of Long Island, in August, 1776, the Abbe Robin said that the men of the American Army "were rivals in praising him, fearing him when he was silent, and retaining their full confidence in him after defeats and disgrace."

His bravery in conflict is clearly evinced when at Princeton in 1777 his officers said, "Our army love their General very much, but they have one thing against him, which is the little care he takes of himself in any action."

The battles of Brandywine and Germantown had been fought, nearly three months of that awful winter at Valley Forge had slowly passed, the countenance of Washington had become more grave and careworn, his stately bearing still more dignified, his manner still more reserved, when Peter S. Du Ponceau came to America with General the Baron von Steuben and gave us, February 23, 1778, his impressions of the chief: "I could not keep my eyes from that imposing countenance,—grave, yet not severe! affable without familiarity! Its predominant expression was calm dignity, through which you could trace the strong feelings of the patriot and discern the father as well as the commander of his soldiers! I have never seen a picture which represents him to me as I saw him at Valley Forge. Perhaps that expression was beyond the skill of the painter, but while I live it will remain impressed on my memory."

The cold of that terrible winter encampment on the Schuylkill had given way to the warmth of June when the race began between the British and American forces across New Jersey to the plains of Monmouth. The night after the battle, the gallant General Lafayette, who had slept by the side of General Washington under the same military cloak, said of him, "During this affair which ended so well, although begun so ill, General Washington appeared to arrest fortune by one glance, and his presence of mind, valour and decision of character were never displayed to greater advantage than at that moment."

Later on in the year, Doctor James Thatcher, a Surgeon of Colonel Henry Jackson's Massachusetts Continental regiment, gives us in his military journal a very graphic description of Washington. "The personal appearance of our Commander-in-Chief is that of the perfect gentleman and accomplished warrior. He is remarkably tall, full six feet, erect and well proportioned. The strength and proportion of his muscles appear to be commensurate with pre-eminent powers of his mind. The severity of his countenance and majestic gracefulness of his deportment impart a strong impression of that dignity and grandeur, which are his peculiar characteristics, and no one can stand in his presence without feeling the ascendancy of his mind and associating with his countenance the idea of wisdom, philanthropy, magnanimity and patriotism. There is a fine symmetry in the features of his face indicative of a benign and dignified spirit."

And at the close of the year Major-General the Marquis de Chastellenx, a noted French officer under the Count de Rochambeau, when he saw the leader of the American troops for the first time said, "It is not my intention to ex-

aggerate, I wish only to express the impression General Washington has left on my mind. Brave without temerity, generous without prodigality, noble without pride, virtuous without serenity: he seems always to have confined himself within those limits where the virtues, by clothing themselves in more lively, but more changeable and doubtful colors, may be mistaken for faults. It will be said of him *at the end* of a long civil war he had nothing with which he could reproach himself."

On the 3rd day of May, 1779, John Bell, Esquire, of Maryland, in a letter to the Reverend Doctor Charles Henry Wharton, of Worcester, England, says, "General Washington is now in the forty-seventh year of his age; he is tall, well-made man, rather larged boned, and has a tolerably genteel address; his features are manly and bold, his eyes of a bluish cast and very lively; his hair a deep brown, his face rather long, and marked with the small pox; his complexion sunburnt and without much colour, and his countenance sensible, composed and thoughtful: there is a remarkable air of dignity about him, with a striking degree of gracefulness. * * * Candour, sincerity, affability and simplicity seem to be the striking features of his character, till an occasion offers of displaying the most determined bravery and independence of spirit."

Again on November 23, 1780, the Marquis de Chastelleux met General Washington at Pompton in our State, and he remarked: "The goodness and benevolence which characterize him are evident from everything about him; but the confidence he gives birth to never occasions improper familiarity; for the sentiment he inspires has the same origin in every individual, a profound esteem for his virtues and a high opinion of his talents."

On the 10th of January, 1781, the gallant General Nathanael Greene, second only to Washington in soldierly ability in the Continental Army, wrote to Colonel Alexander Hamilton, who knew him equally well,—“ I always thought him exceedingly popular, but in many places he is little less than adored, and universally admired. His influence in this country might possibly effect something great.”

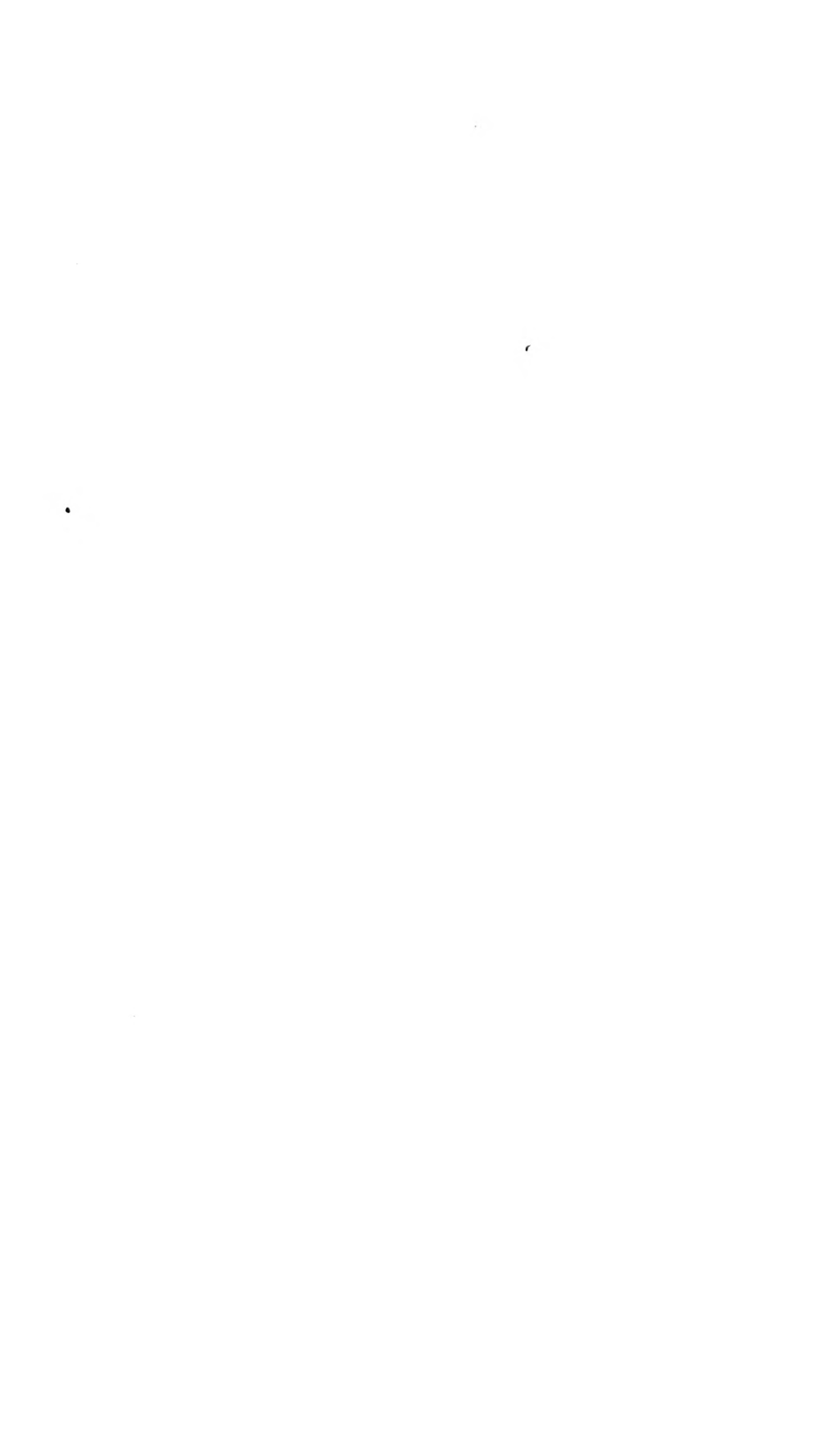
And again in August of the same year the Abbe Robin, Chaplain of the Regiment Soissonnais of the French contingent, said: “ I have seen General Washington, that most singular man, the soul and support of one of the greatest revolutions that has ever happened or can happen. He is of tall and noble stature, well proportioned, a fine, cheerful open countenance, a simple and modest carriage. * * * In all these extensive States they consider him in the light of a beneficent God, dispensing peace and happiness around him. Old men, women and children press about him when he accidentally passes along, and think themselves happy once in their lives to have seen him. The Americans are aroused, animated and inflamed at the very mention of his name; and the first songs that sentiment or gratitude has dictated have been to celebrate General Washington.”

When in September, 1782, the Count de Segur, the Colonel of the same French regiment as Chaplain the Abbe Robin, gives us in his “Recollections,” this description: “His exterior disclosed, as it were, the history of his life; simplicity, grandeur, dignity, calmness, goodness, firmness, the attributes of his character were also stamped upon his features and in all his person. His stature was noble and elevated; the expression of his features mild and benevolent; his

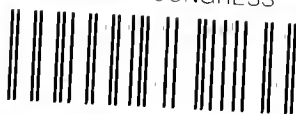
smile graceful and pleasing, his manners simple, without familiarity."

In these quotations we can, as with the pencil of an artist, picture to ourselves the singular majesty of his figure and the peculiar expression of his countenance. We are impressed with his grave dignity, his unconscious sincerity, the reverent awe his appearance and mind created, the pureness of his motives, the simple qualities of his patriotism. And as we feel the warm blood pulse through our veins, the same strain of blood that flowed in the comrades of Washington, we greet him in the words of Light Horse Harry Lee, as "first in war, first in peace, and first in the hearts of his countrymen!"





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